WHO WAS OLD MOTHER HUBBARD?

A MODERN SERMON

[FROM THE PORTSMOUTH (ENG.) MONITOR]

AND

A REFUTATION

(BY AN M. M. C.)

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Who was Old Mother Hubbard?

A MODERN SERMON

ILLUSTRATING THE METHOD

UPON WHICH SOME PARSONS CONSTRUCT THEIR DISCOURSES

SECOND EDITION.

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SERMON.

BRETHREN:

The words of my text are:

"Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none."

These beautiful words, dear friends, carry with them a solemn lesson.

I propose this evening to analyze their meaning, and to attempt to apply it, lofty as it may be, to our every-day life.

"Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone."

Mother Hubbard, you see, was old; there being no mention of others, we may presume she was alone; a widow—a friendless, old, solitary widow.

Yet, did she despair? Did she sit down and weep, or read a novel, or wring her hands? No! "*she went to the cupboard.*" And here

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observe that she *went* to the cupboard. She did not hop, or skip, or run, or jump, or use any other peripatetic artifice; she solely and merely *went* to the cupboard.

We have seen that she was old and lonely, and we now further see that she was poor For, mark, the words are "*the* cupboard."

Not "one of the cupboards," or the "right-hand cupboard," or the "left-hand cupboard," or the one above, or the one below, or the one under the stair, but just *the* cupboard. The one little humble cupboard the poor widow possessed. And why did she go to the cupboard? Was it to bring forth golden goblets, or glittering precious stones, or costly apparel, or feasts, or any other attributes of wealth? *It was to get her poor dog a bone!* Not only was the widow poor, but her dog, the sole prop of her age, was poor too.

We can imagine the scene. The poor dog crouching in the corner, looking wistfully at the solitary cupboard, and the widow going to that cupboard—in hope, in expectation maybe—to open it, although we are not distinctly told that it was not half open, or ajar, to open it for that poor dog.

"But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none."

"When she got there!" You see, dear brethren, what perseverance is.

You see the beauty of persistence in doing right. *She got there.*

There were no turnings and twistings, no slippings and slidings, no leaning to the right, or falterings to the left.

With glorious simplicity we are told *she got there.*

And how was her noble effort rewarded?

"The cupboard was bare!" It was bare! There were to be found neither oranges, nor cheesecakes, nor penny buns, nor gingerbread, nor crackers, nor nuts, nor lucifer matches.

The cupboard was bare!

There was but one, only one, solitary cupboard in the whole of that cottage, and that one, the sole hope of the widow and the glorious loadstar of the poor dog, was bare! Had there been a leg of mutton, a loin of lamb, a fillet of veal, even an ice from Gunter's, the case would have been different, the incident would have been otherwise.

But it was bare, my brethren, bare as a bald head, bare as an infant born without a caul.

Many of you will probably say, with all the pride of worldly sophistry, "The widow, no doubt, went out, and bought a dog-biscuit."

Ah, no! Far removed from these earthly ideas, these mundane desires, poor Mother Hubbard, the widow, whom many thoughtless worldlings would despise, in that she only owned one cupboard, perceived—or I might even say, saw—at once the relentless logic of the situation, and yielded to it with all the heroism of that nature, which had enabled her without deviation to reach the barren cupboard.

She did not attempt, like the stiff-necked scoffers of this generation, to war against the inevitable; she did not try, like the so-called men of science, to explain what she did not understand.

She did nothing. "The poor dog had none!" And then, at this point, our information ceases.

But do we not know sufficient? Are we not cognizant of enough?

Who would dare to pierce the veil that shrouds the ulterior fate of old Mother Hub-

bard, the poor dog, the cupboard, or the bone that was not there?

Must we imagine her still standing at the open cupboard door—depict to ourselves the dog still drooping his disappointed tail upon the floor—the sought- for bone still remaining somewhere else?

Ah! no, my dear brethren, we are not so permitted to attempt to read the future. Suffice it for us to glean from this beautiful story its many lessons; suffice it for us to apply them, to study them as far as in us lies, and, bearing in mind the natural frailty of our nature, to avoid being widows; to shun the patronymic of Hubbard; to have, if our means afford it, more than one cupboard in the house, and to keep stores in them all.

And oh! dear friends, keeping in recollection what we have learned this day, let us avoid keeping dogs that are fond of bones.

But, brethren, if we do—if fate has ordained that we should do any of these things—let us then go, as Mother Hubbard did, straight, without curveting or prancing, to our cupboard, empty though it be; let us, like her, accept the inevitable with calm steadfastness; and

should we, like her, ever be left with a hungry dog and an empty cupboard, may future chroniclers be able to write also of us, in the beautiful words of our text:

"And so the poor dog had none."

—*Portsmouth* (*Eng.*) *Monitor.*

Who was Old Mother Hubbard?

A REFUTATION

IN THE

COMBATIVE,

LUCID, and

ARGUMENTATIVE STYLE

OF SOME OTHERS

A REFUTATION.

My dear Hearers :

It is my purpose this evening to give to you the result of many hours of thought and consultation of various writers, regarding the subject to which our attention has been lately called.

While I hesitate to engage in the controversial spirit of the day, I feel it my duty to expound to you the truth, and to unmask any heresy that may be gaining ground.

The discourse to which I allude was upon the text :

"Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none."

I propose to prove to you this evening, that all its arguments were founded on false premises; that the *whole picture* drawn of the subject of our text—viz., old Mother Hubbard—was diametrically the reverse of the reality; in

short, to give a *complete refutation of the text*, to all those who listened to those first erroneous statements.

Firstly: Old Mother Hubbard was *not* a widow.

I am at a loss to understand why our learned brother should so have drawn upon his imagination as to represent her as such, when, as I shall endeavor to set before you *conclusively* this evening, it is *distinctly* stated in the text, that she was the *wife* of an *ogre!*

My friends, in those days, *men* and *husbands* were designated by the term, "poor dog;" and, indeed, the lightest scholar knows that the term has descended to the present day, and is often appropriated by a man himself under certain existing circumstances.

Now, that this "poor dog" of a husband was an ogre, is abundantly proved by the fact that Mother Hubbard provided for him bones.

Yes! bones! my friends; *but—they—were —human*—bones!

Deep research has convinced me of this fact. I find that in those days ogres did not catch and kill their own meat, as is commonly supposed.

They were but human, my friends, and, like the rest of humanity, preferred rather to purchase labor than perform it. They, therefore, employed their own individual butchers; but, with rare wisdom, they chose some carnivorous animal to supply their table.

In proof of this, we come, *Secondly*, to the word cupboard, as mentioned in the text:

"Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone."

This word cupboard is in our present version misspelt, owing to some fault in copying from the original, and thus is rendered c-u-p-b-o-a-r-d; but the word properly should be spelt c-u-b-b-e-d.

This is a compound word, derived from cub —a young bear—and bed, or deposit, as we speak of the bed of a river.

This was a *bone* deposit—a place where the ogre's food was deposited by the cub.

A young cub was a less expensive butcher than a bear, as, nowadays, labor is cheaper from the young aspirant, than from the assured professional.

Therefore they were the usual employees.

But this ogre, though evidently in the habit of employing a cub in this department, had now become dissatisfied, and procured the more satisfactory services of an old bear; for, if you will carefully examine the text, you will see that this meaning is *obvious*, for, as though to insure all its readers from misunderstanding, you will see that it is *distinctly* stated that

"The cub-bed was *bear*."

Now we come, *Thirdly*, to the word "none." This word in the original stands for two things—first, n-o-n-e, meaning—nothing, which was the heretical sense deducted by my opponent, and the other and correct sense being, n-u-n—a woman with black veil, generally of tender years; and Mother Hubbard, who intended to supply her lord's table with one small bone, found that instead, the bear had secured the bones of a *whole nun!*

Fourthly and lastly, it is clear, from the words "poor dog," that the *ogre* was poor, but *not* Mother Hubbard.

No, my hearers, *evidently* she was *rich*, evidently *she* held the purse-strings, and the ogre had stealthily supplied his table with a luxury,

and his house with a steward, for which he individually was incapable of providing the means.

This is *clearly* the fact from the words of the text, for you will notice that it was *when* she got there—not *before*, but *when* she got there—that she found the change that had been made in the household arrangements.

And then, doubtless, ensued a scene such as some "poor dogs" nowadays understand only too well!

And now, my friends, we come to the moral. It is *not* to beware of widows, as my opponent tried to prove, but for you, my hearers, on one hand, to beware of marrying a poor but extravagant dog, and you, on the other, to beware of marrying a rich and penurious wife.